



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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<i>Module Code: SICH5011</i>	<i>Student number: 2016053</i>
<i>Module title: Sinological English I: A History of Chinese Classical Scholarship</i>	
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English oral presentation

Good morning, respected professor and my fellow classmates!

Today, I would like to introduce Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, a famous Confucian scholar and classicist in Eastern Han Dynasty. I will introduce his life, works, methods and contributions in turn.

Zheng Xuan, was born in Gaomi, Beihai in 127 AD. When he was young he became a Provincial Bailiff but was fired and was back home. He often went to local schools, but was unwilling to be a scribe. His father became angry about this several times, but could not stop him, so he went to the state academy and enrolled as a student. He took Diwuyuanxian of Jingzhao 京兆 as his teacher. He first mastered *Mr.Jing's Changes* 京氏易傳, *Gongyang's Spring and Autumn Annals* 公羊春秋, *Three Sequences Calender* 三統曆, and *Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Arts* 九章算術. He also learned *the Officials of Zhou* 周官, *Book of Rites* 禮記, *Mr. Zuo's Spring and Autumn Annals* 左氏春秋, *Han's Poems* 韓詩, and *Old Text Documents* 古文尚書 from Zhang Gongzu 張恭祖, the Eastern Commandery. With no one to learn from in Shandong, he entered the pass in the West, where he was introduced by Lu Zhi 盧植 of Zhuo Commandery 涿郡 to apprenticed to Ma Rong 馬融 of Fufeng 扶風.

Zheng Xuan was travelling to study, it was more than ten years before he returned to his hometown. He farmed rented land on Donglai 東萊 because his family was poor, but hundreds of students followed him. When the partisan occlusion happened, more than 40 people, including Zheng Xuan and Sun Song 孫嵩 from the same county, have been placed under restrictions. After that, he secretly studied Confucian classics, closed the door and never exiting. At that time, He Xiu 何休 of Rencheng 任城 was devoted to the learning of *Gongyang Defended like Mozi* 公羊墨守, *the Uncurable Diseases in the Diaphragm of Mr.Zuo* 左氏膏肓, and *Crippling Diseases in Guliang* 穀梁廢疾. However, Zheng Xuan has rebutted all three books. When He Xiu saw them, he said, "Zheng Kangcheng entered my chamber, grasped my lance, and used it to attack me!" Earlier, after the restoration, such classicists as Fang Sheng 范升, Chen Yuan 陳元, Li Yu 李育, and Jia Kui 賈逵 argued over Old Text and New Text learning. Afterwards, Ma Rong 馬融 responded to the Governor of Beidi 北地 Liu Gui, and Zheng Xuan responded to He Xiu. Their argumentation was penetrating and their evidence profound; from this point on Old Text learning became bright.

In the spring of 200 AD, Zheng Xuan dreamed of Confucius telling him: "Rise up, rise up! This year Jupiter will be in the Dragon asterism; next year it will be in the Snake asterism." After waking, he confirmed this with the apocrypha and thus knew that his life would end. After a while,

he was confined to bed by illness. His illness grew worse and he never recovered. He died six months later at the age of 74.

His last command was to have a simple burial. There were more than a thousand persons with him, from the governor down, and they were all dressed in mourning. His disciples jointly compiled Zheng Xuan's answers to his disciples' questions about the *Five Classics* and formed the eight volumes of Zheng Xuan's Records based on the format of the *Analects*.

In all, Zheng annotated the *Zhou Changes* 周易, *Esteemed Documents* 尚書, *Mao Poems* 毛詩, *Ceremonials and Rituals* 儀禮, *Book of Rites* 禮記, *Analects* 論語, *Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經, *Great Commentary on the Esteemed Documents* 尚書大傳, *Zhonghou* 中候, and *Qianxiang Calendar* 乾象曆. Furthermore, he composed the *Discourse on the Seven Governing Bodies in Astronomy* 天文七政論, *Interpretation of the Lu Rites of the Grand and Collective Sacrifices* 魯禮諦裕義, *Discourse on the Six Arts* 六藝論, *Register on the Mao Poems* 毛詩譜, *Refutation of Xu Shen's Divergent Interpretations of the Five Classics* 許慎五經異義. He focused on the explanation of words. Other scholars somewhat scoffed at his verbosity. But because of his familiarity with the classics and exegesis, he was hailed as a skilled Confucian. He was venerated as the founding classical master in the regions of Lu and Qi.

Zheng Xuan's academic philosophy favored old classics, he learned from

other sources and was equally familiar with the texts of new classics, so he was known as a "comprehensive learning scholar" 通學之才. In other words, he read all kinds of books and could understand them well. In addition, he has always been able to apply the subtle meaning of the classics to the world, etiquette and rules and institutions. This flexible and practical application can be seen in his various writings, especially in his annotations to the *Poems*.

Zheng Xuan's greatest achievement was to edit and annotate the "Three Rites". In the Han Dynasty, *Lijing* 禮經 was only given by teachers without annotations. Although Ma Rong and Lu Zhi proposed the name "*Three Rites*", it was not confirmed until Zheng Xuan annotated the *Rites of Zhou, Ceremonials and Rituals* and *Book of Rites* respectively. The "Three Rites" is a very valuable historical document, which is the source of ancient Chinese laws and regulations. However, it is difficult for us to make clear many of the records from the original text, so Zheng's annotations are indispensable. The contribution of Zheng's annotations help us understand the content of the Three Rites and in correcting the errors of the scriptures is indelible. Moreover, when Zheng Xuan explained the scriptures, he added a lot of materials other than the scriptures, which greatly enriched the content of the documents. These materials must have been based on literature or teachers' theories at

that time, but now most of them have been lost, and some of them have to be preserved thanks to Zheng's annotations, which is a great contribution of Zheng's annotations. Moreover, because Zheng's annotations are comprehensive, extensive and detailed, and also adopt different theories, if we can add detailed analysis and make clear its origin, it will be of great benefit to future generations to study the academic history of the Han Dynasty. Zheng's elucidation of the meaning of rites is also helpful for people in today to study the history of political thought in Han Dynasty. In addition, Zheng's annotations are indispensable to the study of ancient philology, phonology, exegetics and so on. In particular, Zheng Xuan's *Notes on Three Rites* is an important document that must be relied on for the excavation of cultural relics below the pre-Qin period. On the whole, Zheng Xuan annotated all kinds of classics, and made the most efforts on the "Three Rites" and achieved the highest achievements.

To sum up, Zheng Xuan spent his whole life on sorting out the ancient cultural heritage. He was not only the most famous classical scholar in Chinese history, but also an outstanding educator at that time. He was compatible with many disciplines such as collation and language. I once read his commentaries on the *Classic of Filial Piety* and was impressed by his precise interpretation of the scriptures and his deep understanding of

the teachings of sages. I hope to have more time to read and study his works in the future.

That concludes my presentation. Any feedback and suggestions will be appreciated. Thank you for listening patiently!